

Homicide and Suicide among the Joluo of Kenya

group had less than three years' education and over half of the female group had less than two years' education. This pattern, however, as already indicated, is changing rapidly. The majority of the Joluo are nominally Christians, although half of those who called themselves Christians were polygamists. Historically, of course, all of the schools in Luo were Mission schools and therefore those who go to school tend to call themselves "Christians," and most of them in fact have a basic understanding of the Christian religion. 87/ 77

One aspect of Joluo life which has changed considerably is the tremendous increase in spatial mobility. Prior to European ascendancy, the Joluo did not move among the tribal units because of the continual wars between them. Moreover, banishment from the tribe usually meant death at the hands of the neighboring Nandi, Kipsigia, or Masai. Later, however, the village census established that most Luo males had been out of their district and well over half had been to Nairobi or beyond. At any given point in time nearly one half of the adult male population is engaged in employment away from the tribal area. Nearly one half of the Joluo adult women in the sample, 40 per cent, had been outside of their district, although only 11 per cent had been to Nairobi or beyond. It is the custom, therefore, for married men to migrate for labor and to leave their wives and families in their family locations to cultivate the gardens.¹ 166

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The Nilotic Joluo regard violence as an unnecessary loss of control, or at best a calculated necessary last resort to secure 183●

¹ Professor E. E. Evans-Pritchard has written a study of the Luo in his "Luo Tribes and Clans" (*Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, No. 7), and description of the marriage customs of the Luo in his "Marriage Customs of the Luo of Kenya" (*Africa*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1952). Dr. A. Southall has published a memorandum entitled "Lineage Formation among the Luo," Memorandum 297, International African Institute, London, 1952. My own work among the Luo, *Luo and Custom of the Joluo People of Kenya*, is forthcoming. 113

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- 183 goals which have been carefully weighed and assessed as to the possible supernatural and social consequences. The Joluo believe that a goal does not justify the means if the means require violence, unless all methods of arbitration, conciliation, appeal to authority, both temporal and supernatural, have been tried and proved to be unsuccessful or inadequate.

783 Violence requires cleansing—physical and spiritual cleansing of the most exacting nature—to avoid the supernatural
C62 consequences (*chies*) which violence may bring in its wake.

One case has been recorded which contains an excellent description of the ceremonial and ritual cleansing thought to be essential after a murder. This particular murder was planned and executed by a group which, after years of thought and effort to resolve the conflict without violence, finally resorted to murder. Obviously, with the coming of the European, other factors were involved to escape detection for an act which in the old days would have given the group high status within its own community and which would have created feuds or precipitated a war that ultimately would have been resolved by blood compensation or schism of the political unit and migration by the weakest group.

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[C28] Violence which arises immediately and unpremeditatedly from quarrels, drinking, infidelity, sex, marital tensions, or family differences, and which results in a death, is not regarded in the same way as predetermined action decided upon as a last resort. Ceremonial cleansing is still necessary but does not take the extreme form because these acts are regarded by the Luo as bringing consequences which affect the individual only, that is *kuer*, and not *chies*, which affects the group, clan, or tribe as a whole. Fortunately British law makes a similar distinction: that between murder and manslaughter. It will be found therefore that the majority of cases involving Joluo which have come before the courts of Kenya as murder cases are treated and punished as cases of manslaughter. The Joluo do not, however, understand why many of these consisted in

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and fast rule can be placed on the time of the temporary termination of the marital relationship, it is generally left to the good sense of the men and women concerned. 843 [894]

The regulation of the diet. Here again the restrictions aim mainly at minimizing the chances of the child being too big, thus rendering it easier for the mother to give birth. Among the foods which women normally eat, bananas are eliminated during pregnancy because of their supposed fattening effect upon the child, and the danger of thus causing a difficult delivery. Among the most conservative women, pumpkins are placed in the same category with the additional belief that, since their contents are mostly water, they have a weakening effect upon the child. 843 262 [845]

Sugary foodstuffs such as canes, sweets, sugary tea or coffee are among the things which expectant mothers do not eat. Women believe that these foods produce babies so fat that they put a strain on the mother's strength. For the same reason, the excessive drinking of gruel is prohibited, and hot gruel is especially avoided on the grounds that it would scald the baby. But while these restrictions are adhered to in principle, in actual practice women with a strong liking for forbidden foodstuffs do not refrain from eating them. [183]•

A factor of great psychological significance is the belief that Luo mothers begin to yield to the will of their babies long before they are born. Among them are some who, during pregnancy, develop a habit of eating dried mud and other peculiar foodstuffs, one baby causing a mother to eat these and the next turning her appetite against them. These strange habits of eating are attributed to the will of the expected child; and it is believed that the domination of the child over the mother, enduring through the early part of its life, begins in the period of pregnancy.